

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2006

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Regula and Ranking Member Obey:

We are writing to urge you to provide at least \$1.3 billion in the Fiscal Year 2007 (FY '07) Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill to maintain funds for career and technical education through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (including Basic State Grants, Tech Prep, and national and occupational and employment information programs). The Carl D. Perkins Act (Perkins) provides comprehensive federal support dedicated to career and technical education programs for secondary and postsecondary students, as well as research and demonstration projects. President Bush's FY '07 budget request, however, proposes to eliminate all funding for the Perkins program.

The Perkins Act supports career and technical education programs at the state and local levels, prepares youth and adults for the future by building their skills for the careers of today and tomorrow, and is essential to strengthening the American workforce. Serving more than 10 million Americans across the country, Perkins programs take place in comprehensive high schools, technical high schools, area technical centers, and in postsecondary institutions providing technical programs, such as community colleges, technical institutes, skills centers, and other public and private two and four year colleges. Without these programs, our ability to provide the career and technical education necessary to create the highly skilled workforce needed to compete in a demanding global economy would be severely hindered.

Career and technical education has proven results -- providing effective skill-building opportunities and improving employment outcomes. Students completing a rigorous academic core coupled with a career concentration have test scores that are equal to or higher than those of students considered to be "college prep". They are also more likely to pursue postsecondary education, have a higher grade point average in college and are less likely to drop out of school in the first year. As a result, Perkins students have better employment and earnings outcomes than other students.

America has evolved from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy, and workers must be equipped with knowledge and skills that can be quickly upgraded and adapted to meet the rapidly changing conditions of the 21st century. There continues to be a strong demand for and an inadequate supply of employees with these skill levels. A recent Chamber of Commerce survey showed that almost half of the employers in the U.S. are having a hard time finding qualified job applicants, and more than 90 percent of respondents in a National Association of Manufacturers study reported shortages of skilled workers. The talent shortage being reported is not a theoretical or distant problem. In fact, 83 percent of respondents indicated that these shortages are currently impacting their ability to serve customers. The education and training

supported by Perkins is vital to closing the skills gap and ensuring that the next generation of Americans have the skills to meet the needs of an increasingly high-tech workplace.

The federal investment in Perkins programs is essential to building upon the improvements in the career and technical education system of the past few years. Eliminating funding for the Perkins Act would force already cash-strapped schools, training programs, and community colleges to reduce or eliminate programs that are producing results in communities across the country. It would mean a loss of funds for program improvement and innovation, including integration of academic and technical skills, equipment, professional development, career guidance and counseling, career and technical student organizations, and programs that help students transition to post secondary opportunities and connect them to business and industry.

Despite competing budget priorities, the Subcommittee has demonstrated a strong commitment for this program in the past. We urge you to continue this bipartisan commitment by providing at least \$1.3 billion in funding for Perkins programs in the FY '07 Labor, Health And Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. We appreciate your attention to this request, and hope we can count on your continued support.

Sincerely,

Nickie L. Klein

Chuck Roemer

John Spatt

Zane Evans

Don Young

Barney Frank

Edwin L. Engle

Patrick Toomey

David Luce

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Al Bice

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